

# BE A GOOD SORT TO YOUR GARDEN



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# START COMPOSTING

## Composting... it benefits you, it benefits everyone

Waste management is one of the most pressing environmental issues both today, and for the future. Composting is just one of the ways that all of us can contribute to recycling our own household garbage. Not only does composting reduce the overall volume of wasteful landfill refuse, it also creates a tangible benefit in our gardens as a soil additive and mulching agent.

## A greener garden

The humus material from a compost enclosure can be produced inexpensively in the back yard. When spread over topsoil, it improves the texture, porosity, water retention and organic content of the soil. Instead of relying exclusively on commercial fertilizer, the household gardener can create his own convenient supply of 'home grown' compost.



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## An easy, natural process

You don't have to be a particularly dedicated or expert gardener to create your own compost. Most of the materials you'll need are part of the garbage you discard from your kitchen every day. The success of your composting operation is just dependent on mixing the right combination of those waste products and letting nature take its course.

## Finding the right location

While many people choose a remote corner of their garden as a composting area, you don't have to tuck it away. A properly maintained compost enclosure can be right out in the open. The spot you choose must be sunny, airy and away from standing water. Compost enclosures at cottages should be kept away from waterways and wells, and should be at least a foot above the water table.

## The enclosure

To keep your compost neat, efficient and manageable, it's best to enclose the operation. Choose a size that's large enough to supply you with enough fertilizer for your garden, yet small enough to operate efficiently on the amount of waste materials you have. The size of the enclosure is up to you. The height of the enclosure should be between one foot and five feet for best results.

Remember, air must be allowed to get at the compost. You need enough room next to the operation to work with it, so leave some breathing space.

## Maintaining your composter

Composting is a chemical process using household waste, organic materials, air and water. There is really very little maintenance required. Simply put, the biodegradable materials, air and water create heat and break the mix down into nutritious plant food. All that's required of the gardener is turning of the pile every two or three weeks, and making sure that the pile is moist, but not soggy. Because heat is the active

ingredient in composting, the operation should be protected in winter by covering it. By producing heat, the compost operation will kill off harmful germs.

## Turning the compost

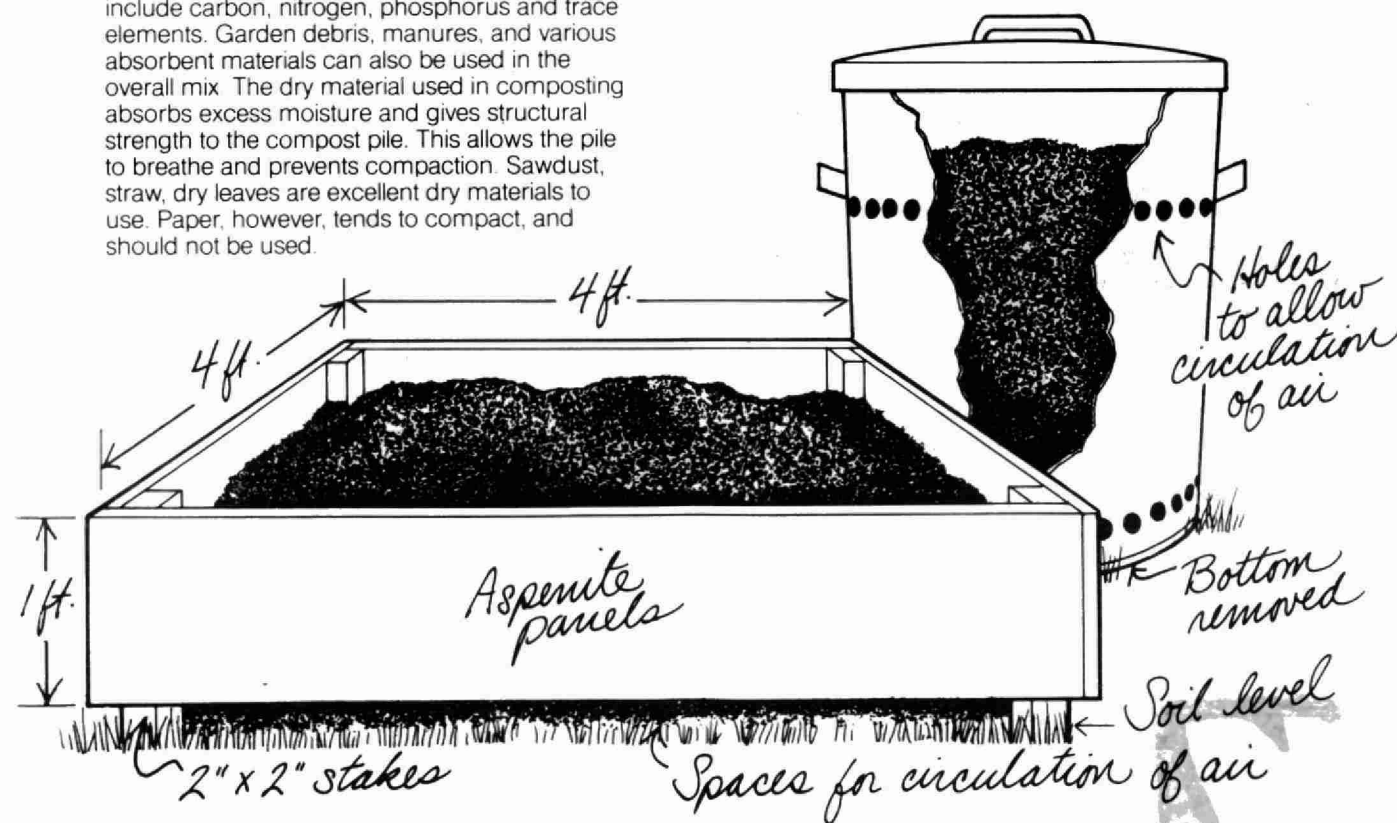
Turning your compost with a pitchfork or shovel aerates and mixes it. After every turning, the compost will rejuvenate its chemical reaction and heat up again. **When the heat production stops, your compost is ready to be used.**

## Raw materials

One of the principal factors that makes composting a useful and economical exercise is the use of ordinary kitchen garbage as the main 'fuel'. The essential nutrients this refuse provides include carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and trace elements. Garden debris, manures, and various absorbent materials can also be used in the overall mix. The dry material used in composting absorbs excess moisture and gives structural strength to the compost pile. This allows the pile to breathe and prevents compaction. Sawdust, straw, dry leaves are excellent dry materials to use. Paper, however, tends to compact, and should not be used.

## When you're ready to go

There is a generally accepted technique in building a compost heap. Begin with a thin layer of commercial fertilizer to increase the nutrient value of the heap and start the chemical process. To this initial layer, dry layers and wet layers of materials are added in thicknesses of between 3-6 inches. If the weather becomes particularly dry, water can be added, but remember, the pile should only be moist. If it gets too wet, the compost will not heat properly, and will give off a more than noticeable odour. If compost becomes too wet, it should be turned more often, and absorbent material should be added.



## Helpful Hints

The smaller the pieces of garbage and absorbent material, the faster the composting process. Plant stalks, for instance, can be chopped before being added to the pile.

Moisture content can be gauged by looking at the material in the pile and seeing if it glistens. That's the ideal moisture balance.

If possible, use insect screens to keep flies away from the top of the pile. Cover the pile with plastic in the winter to retain heat.

## Construction of an enclosure

### The simplest approach

A large garbage can, barrel or wooden box with the bottom knocked out is an easy way to begin your composting operation. Holes should be made in the side to allow air circulation.

### Custom compost enclosure

Mark off a 4 foot square and dig down 12-18 inches. Drive four stakes 2" square x 2 ft. long into each corner. Leave about 1 ft. of stake above the ground. From an 8' x 4' aspenite plywood sheet, cut four 1' x 4' rectangles and nail them to the stakes to act as the side of the enclosure. Leave about an inch between the sides and the ground. The remaining 4' x 4' sheet can be used as a cover in the winter.

## Other possible materials

Concrete, wood, bricks, even chicken wire can be used to house your compost heap. The main thing to remember is air circulation, and structural rigidity to keep the pile in order. It's even possible to create a double bin. One side would be used to accumulate garbage and the other half as the active compost heap.

## Typical composting materials

Wet kitchen garbage like food leftovers  
Vegetable and fruit peelings

Coffee grounds  
Peanut and nut shells  
Leaves  
Pet waste  
Straw and hay  
Grass clippings  
Garden clippings

And in limited quantities  
Egg shells  
Clam and oyster shells  
Sawdust  
Cardboard  
Barbecue grill residues